

## Maria Minna receives award for Sri Lankan peace initiative

Beaches-East York Member of Parliament Maria Minna was presented with the Canada-Sri Lanka Business Council's 2006 President's Award at a gala dinner attended by more than 400 members of Toronto's Sri Lankan community on December 15, 2006.

"The President's Award is awarded annually to an eminent Canadian who has contributed in large measure to bilateral relations between Canada and Sri Lanka," the Council said in the awards program.

"To this end, Ms. Minna has worked tirelessly in the last decade supporting the peace initiatives in Sri Lanka. Her work with the Sri Lankan expatriate community in Canada is legendary. The community has had the privilege of her company at numerous social and cultural gatherings.

"In addition, her role as Chair of the Canada-Sri Lanka Parliamentary Friendship Group in Ottawa has been acknowledged as a job 'well done' by all friends of Sri Lanka in the nation's capital. She has received many accolades in Canada as well as in Sri Lanka for her contribution to the community. The consensus among the board of directors was therefore unanimous when the time dawned to vote for the 2006 winner of the President's Award."

### **Tributes to Maria Minna**

"I am happy to learn that the winner of this year's President's Award is the Hon. Maria Minna, P.C., M.P., a friend of Sri Lanka who has served our expatriate community in Canada for nearly a decade."

-- Mahinda Rajapaksa  
President of Sri Lanka

"My special congratulations go out to Maria Minna, MP for Beaches-East York, for being honoured with this year's President's Award. I add my voice to the tributes being paid to you – for your commitment to multiculturalism, your work with the Sri Lankan expatriate community and for supporting the peace initiative in Sri Lanka."

-- Dalton McGuinty  
Premier of Ontario

"I would also like to congratulate and wish Hon. Maria Minna, P.C., M.P., for receiving the President's Award for 2006 from the Canada Sri-Lanka Business Council. It is noteworthy that as President of the Canada-Sri Lanka [Parliamentary] Friendship Group

in the federal parliament, she is promoting close relations between the government and people of Canada and Sri Lanka.”

-- C.S. Poolokasingham

Consul General - Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka

“I would like to congratulate Maria Minna, M.P., Beaches-East York, as this year’s President’s Award Winner. Your contributions to the Sri Lankan business community have paved the way for many success stories, and have created many benefits for our province.”

-- Harinder S. Takhar

Minister of Small Business and Entrepreneurship



## **Maria Minna in action**

When the ferocious tsunami tidal wave hit Sri Lanka on December 26, 2004, Maria Minna jumped into action and acted as an important link between worried Sri Lankans in Toronto and the Canadian government.

She was on the phone, on the radio, at vigils in the temples, keeping the community informed of what Canada was doing in this time of great crisis and informing the government of the concerns of the community.

In March 2005, -- in her capacity as Chair of the Canada-Sri Lanka Parliamentary Friendship Group -- Maria led a delegation of Canadian politicians and business executives to Sri Lanka to: 1) View the devastation created by the tsunami first-hand and

ensure that aid was getting through; 2) Promote the peace process; and 3) Encourage two-way trade between Canada and Sri Lanka.

The delegation visited the tsunami-ravaged areas of the island nation and had discussions with political leaders on both sides with regard to the distribution of aid and the peace process.

She advised both sides -- in very strong and persuasive language -- that the killing had to stop and that the children of Sri Lanka had a right to live in peace.

Children should not be afraid of walking to school out of concern that they might be abducted and forced to bear arms.

Families should not have to huddle in bunkers at night -- caught in the crossfire of this horrible civil war.

People in a country as beautiful -- as truly beautiful -- as Sri Lanka should not have to bear the psychological scars of the killings, bombings, kidnappings and torture.

The delegation was very focused when they met with the Prime Minister of Sri Lanka, the leader of the opposition, Sri Lanka-Canada Friendship group, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, Tamil MPs, Muslim MPs, the JVP and representatives of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) -- both in Jaffna and in the LTTE-controlled areas in the north.

They also met with representatives of civil society and international NGOs working together to bring hope and relief to the people who had survived years of civil war and had, just recently, been hit by the awesome tsunami.

During her acceptance speech at the gala dinner, Maria Minna said: "Our discussions with politicians on both sides of the issue centred upon the need to get back to the negotiating table

We explained to them how a federal structure -- like the one that we have in Canada -- would work and how it could be an answer to the problem of enabling Tamils and Sinhalese to live side by side -- in peace and in harmony.

"We expressed the huge importance for everyone to respect Human Rights -- that respect for diversity and pluralism was a strong basis for any agreement.

"And we also stressed that protection of minorities -- in every part of the country -- was an essential element of a stable democracy.

"My impression at the time -- and, I have to be honest with you -- was that there was no real commitment from the leadership on either side to get back to the negotiating table and come up with a workable and lasting peace.

“Each side – like two bull elephants locked in mortal combat – was watching for a sign of weakness on the other side and getting ready to move in for the kill.

“And, unfortunately, the situation today tends to bear out my initial impression.

“If anything, there is less hope of a negotiated peace today than there was when we were in Sri Lanka.”

## **More work to be done**

Maria Minna said that she would welcome an opportunity to return to Sri Lanka and assist in the peace process.

“Believe me, I want to help bring peace to Sri Lanka. I want to help organize support for the peace process in the Sri Lankan community in Canada.

“I want us to come up with some good Canadian solutions to the problems in Sri Lanka.

“I want us to promote the Canadian model of federalism and multiculturalism as one possible way of having all of the people of Sri Lanka live together in peace and harmony.

“We are – we Canadians – a model for the world.

“Let’s see if we can help adapt that model to the island paradise of Sri Lanka.

“The children of Sri Lanka deserve a much safer world in which to grow up.

“Let’s work together and help make that happen.”

Ms. Minna said that she would be talking to Canada’s Minister of Foreign Affairs about having another Parliamentary peace/trade delegation visit Sri Lanka early in 2007 and that she would consult with Canada’s High Commissioner in Sri Lanka as to when would be the best time to go.